

Defining Materialism

For the complete debate with materialists see [this list](#)

Defining Materialism

A response to [Aparthib's latest argument](#).

By [Ali Sina](#)

Although the debate seems to be over, and the newer messages posted by my opponents contain little more than argumentum ad nauseam, I quickly jot down a response to Aparthib's latest message. The purpose of this essay is to define materialism that its significance seems to elude my opponent.

Dear Aparthib.

Yes you said that materialism is an obsolete term. I heard that. I quoted the definition of materialism from Dictionary.com and asked you to explain in what ways your views differ from that definition. From your writings I gather that your views are compatible with materialism.

You wrote:

"It is a fallacy for a rationalist to debate whether "X" exists or not, when "X" is not even defined."

I am afraid that is not a true statement. There are many things that are not defined but a rationalist would not disregard them. The definition will come later. For example a few years ago SETI picked a signal in their radar which was undefined. That was a sensation for SETI and everyone else, even though it was neither defined nor repeated.

In 1976, Viking Orbiter 1 took some pictures from the surface of the Mars and one of those pictures looked like the face of a man. That was not a well defined image, many speculations were made but later more sharper images proved it was just a natural rock formation. Here something curious was observed, but it was not dismissed just because it was not well defined, rather more probes were made and eventually the mystery was solved.

In another example that could be even more appropriate, a person may have suicidal thoughts. It may not be clear why this individual has such thoughts. That does not mean science will disregard that because it has no explanation for it. Now we know most of the suicidal thoughts are caused by chemical imbalances. The anomaly was not disregarded just because it was in someone's mind and not well defined, but rather it was studied and eventually defined and partially solved.

With Paranormal we see a clear case of dogmatic denial that is irrational and unscientific. If depression can be studied and resolved scientifically, why not paranormal? Are paranormal experiences mental events or are they something else? This has to be studied critically not rejected with “I give you one million dollar to prove it exists”, which underlies the mockery of the challenger and his foregone denial of such experiences. The problem with the materialists is that they do not dare to touch this topic. It is taboo. This attitude is neither scientific nor rational.

The claim that we can't define it and hence we do not talk about it is a lame excuse. The first thing is to acknowledge the phenomenon and then study it to define it. The problem with materialists is that they do not even want to acknowledge the phenomenon. They want to avoid this talk altogether. They have already made their minds that it is all hallucination. For the materialists the case is closed before it is ever studied. Why?.. Because paranormal, if proven to have any substance shatters their belief in matter. This attitude is neither scientific nor rational. It is dogmatic and it borders fanaticism.

That is why people have no sympathy for the materialists and that is why you my friend, try to hide your identity as one. Materialism, just like all other religions, is dogmatic, irrational and unscientific. It is based on faith and not on empirical observation of facts. When you even deny the existence of those facts, how can you study them?

No one is afraid to study depression, even though this is a very subjective anomaly, because no matter what are the causes of depression our findings will not threaten our beliefs. But the materialists are afraid of studying the paranormal. That is because if it is proven that matter is not all there is, their faith in matter is destroyed. Just as Muslims can't bear the thought that Allah is not God, materialists can't bear the thought that matter is not the only reality.

It is only by comparing the materialists to the most close minded religionists that we can get an insight into their mind and understand why they are so touchy about the subject of paranormal.

You also named what is taboo for a materialist. The following is your list:

You wrote:

Examples of X are:

- A. God
- B. Soul
- C. Spirit
- D. Spiritual world

What is so dirty about these words that you do not want to talk about them? Is it just because they are old theories? Why the String Theory, is not taboo and God is? Both these theories are unproven. Both of them explain something. Why one theory should be accepted

as legitimate and the other dismissed? We know *argumentum ad antiquitatem* is a logical fallacy. An argument is not true just because it has been around for a long time. Is the reverse of that true? Can we dismiss a theory just because it is an old theory? What are your logical bases to dismiss the above as possible theories?

If I say God does not exist, the onus of disproving his inexistence is on me. And I say that God, at least the way he is described by the monotheistic religions, does not exist. This I can prove logically. What are your evidences that God or other “taboos” you talked about do not exist? I can’t disprove that soul, spirit or the spiritual world, which is really the same thing, does not exist. Therefore I am skeptic and withhold judgment. I am not shunning the discussion and await any finding that may prove or disprove the existence of the soul. I see many evidences that point to the fact that life is not a function of the matter but rather is reflected in it and independent from it. This theory could be true or false. So far there is no solid evidence, neither in favor nor against it. Do you have any convincing evidence that soul does not exist? “No-one-has-been-able-to-prove-it-yet” is not an answer. No one has been able to prove many scientific theories but that does not mean they should be dismissed. They will remain as possible theories even though they may be proven wrong later.

According to your statement, the above terms cannot be defined logically and reflect a “state of human mind reflecting ignorance at the very fundamental level.”

I agree that those terms can’t be defined but they do not reflect ignorance. Not knowing is not ignorance. Theorizing is not ignorance. What is ignorance is assurance or denial of things that we can’t understand. Therefore the materialists are just as ignorant as those whom they berate.

The truth is that any belief is based on ignorance. Belief means accepting things without evidence. If one believes in god, soul or spirit without evidence or if he rejects these things without evidence he is a believer. I already discussed that one can even deny something and be a believer, e.g. the Flat Earth Society or Sheik Ibn Baaz who deny that the Earth is round. This denial does not make them intellectual or freethinkers.

So if you are certain that soul and God do not exist just because you can’t define them that belief is based on ignorance. The correct attitude is to remain skeptic until a theory is proven false or true.

2.

You wrote:

“Let me stress to you again that "Materialism is not science", and "Science is not Materialism".

I know that. I am not against science. I am against the unscientific materialistic dogma that you uphold. Science is not a belief. Science is observation of facts. Materialism is a belief that is based on only the discovered facts and nothing else. Now since science is constantly evolving. But beliefs are static. That is why beliefs are incompatible with science and

materialism although claims that it is based on science, is just as unscientific as other religious doctrines.

You wrote:

“Matter is not the most fundamental level. The most fundamental level is that of information. Information being the laws of Physics”

Finally you are coming along. This is what I explained in detail in my article [Rational Spirituality](#). I gave a different name to what you call information. I called it the Single Principle or the Nonbeing. But let not names come in between us. We are talking about the same thing. The important thing is that you recognize that laws of Physics are the fundamental substance of this Universe.

Nevertheless, the laws of the Physics are not the only laws that rule this Universe. At a more evolved level of existence, say for example at animal level, there are laws that are just as natural as physical laws but they are unique to animal world.

Take the example of motherly instinct or other instincts that are also laws without which animals would not be able to procreate or survive. In human kingdom all laws governing the physical world, the plant and the animal world apply but there are laws that are uniquely tailored for humans.

Take the example of altruistic love. Only humans are capable of endangering their own lives to save someone else's, especially if that someone else is a stranger. Justice, compassion, love, etc. are natural laws that apply to humans only.

It is the sum of all these laws that apply to all realms of existence that together make the Single Principle underlying the creation. This is not a fact. It is a logical theory. There is already a theory that says all the four physical laws that are called fundamentals were originally one. It is also logical to believe that even laws governing the other more evolved worlds are manifestations of this single law or principle.

You said that this in popular parlance is known as "It from Bit" (It = matter, Bit = information). I said the same thing when I said the Nonbeing is the mother of all beings.

In the light of the above, you wrote:

“These insights of Physics were not known to classical philosophers who invented materialism. So it is out of date to insist on materialism with today's knowledge of science. So NO, I am not a materialist, in answer to your question, because I don't believe that matter is the basis for all existence, rather I believe that the laws of physics is the basis of all of existence, as far as the best evidence we have so far. I am a rationalist, and rationalism only relies on logic and evidence for FORMING ANY CONCLUSION about REALITY.”

If you read my article [Rational Spirituality](#) you'll see that I am basically saying what you mentioned above. If you agree that laws are the basis of all the existence, you must agree

with me and if so why we are arguing?

The fact is that your philosophy so far has been purely materialism.

Let us check another dictionary for the definition of materialism and compare it with what you said so far:

“Materialism expresses the view that the only thing that exists is matter if anything else, such as mental events exist, then it is reducible to matter.” <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com>

Isn't this what you say?

Now of course according to the same dictionary,

“The definition of "matter" in modern philosophical materialism extends to all scientifically observable entities such as energy, forces, and the curvature of space.”

This is what I understand from your position and that is why I said you are a materialist or perhaps a neo-materialist. If I am wrong I would be glad if you could tell me which part of this definition does not describe your views.

Here is another dictionary definition of materialism:

(*Philosophy*) the monist doctrine that matter is the only reality and that the mind, the emotions, etc., are merely functions of it. <http://www.wordreference.com>

I on the other hand believe that it is not the matter, forces, energy or curvatures of space that are the basis of existence. These are all different forms of matter. These are all manifestations of the laws of existence of which the physical laws are only a part. The essence of this Law, which I called the Single Principle, is not material. It is a Nonbeing that is the mother of all Being or in modern language “the It is from Bit”.

This “Bit”, is the impulse of existence. This is the vital spark that gave birth to, not just life, but all the existence. Our forefathers called it Spirit. Please forgive them for using that dirty word that offends your materialistic sensibility.

Based on this definition you are a materialist. But what am I? I am a vitalist.

Vitalism is the doctrine that states life cannot be explained solely by materialism. Often, the non-material element is referred to as the "vital spark" or energy. Some believers in vitalism equate this element with the soul.

Vitalism has a long history in medical philosophies. Most traditional healing practices posited that disease was the result of some imbalance in the vital energies which distinguish living from non-living matter. In the western tradition, these vital forces were identified as the humours; eastern traditions posited similar forces such as qi, prana, etc.

So let us at least be clear where we are standing. As long as we do not even know which school of thought we belong, how can we have any meaningful discussion?

You defined rationalism as:

“Rationalism does not allow one to make any meaningful statement/conclusion outside reality, beyond the phenomenal (i.e the world of senses, albeit the senses now include sensitive scientific equipments) world.”

This is of course the definition of materialism and not of rationalism:

Rationalism, is a philosophical doctrine that asserts that the truth should be determined by reason and factual analysis, rather than faith, dogma or religious teaching.

As a rationalist you do not believe or reject anything without factual proof. If any argument can be demonstrated by reason, it enters into the field of possibilities and is not discarded unless proven untrue. It is also not accepted until proven true.

For example I may believe that depiction of violence in TV may have negative effect on children who may want to act out that violence. This is a reasonable and rational hypothesis although I may not have any statistical evidence to back up my claim. Further studies may demonstrate whether my thesis is right or not. But it is illogical to dismiss that hypothesis just because I have no data at hand to prove my point. If what I say is not contrary to reason then it is a possibility even though it is not factually proven.

No serious studies have been performed on the phenomena of paranormal. The reports are either by the believers in paranormal or those who disbelieve it altogether. Therefore they are mostly subjective and not reliable.

Paranormal phenomena are either external or mental events. We can't say one way or another unless we study them.

You wrote:

“It doesn't make sense to talk about the "existence" or non-existence of anything not observable.”

This is of course a logical fallacy that the materialists apply selectively to the discussion of the immaterial world. There are many things that are not observable, but entirely subjective and yet they are studied. Mood is one such example. ESP is very much observable. Telepathy or dreams although very personal experiences they are as real as feelings. And yet you do not deny the existence of feelings but deny the existence of telepathy.

You wrote:

Dark matter exists because we can observe it. Before it was discovered it would not make sense to refer to "Dark Matter"

Dark matter has not been observed or detected by any means. But its presence is inferred because of its gravitational effect on visible matter such as stars and galaxies. But the accelerated expansion of the Universe could be caused by something completely different. The dark force may not be a gravitational force. It could be a force unknown to humanity and dark matter may not exist at all. The theory that the dark force is gravitational and is caused by dark matter is just a hypothesis. What if the dark force is not gravitational? Does it mean that the theory of Dark Matter is hocus pocus?

Despite this uncertainty about the dark matter and the dark force, no one is disregarding this theory just because it can't be demonstrated. It is still a plausible theory even though it may prove to be wrong.

You also wrote the following which seems you are making two contradictory statements in one paragraph.

a)

Does that mean that nothing exists beyond what our logic and evidence can prove? Of course not. But we cannot claim something to exist which is not amenable to our senses. We can only say in a general way that there MAY BE entities "outside" our phenomenal world that can potentially become part of our phenomenal world if our sense perceptions are improved enough.

b)

But before they are perceived in the phenomenal world they cannot be referred to by any specific names and claimed to even "possibly" exist,

(a) and (b) are the two contradictory statements. It is not clear to me what are you saying here. Is it possible that anything could exist beyond our observation or is it not?

These are two opposing statements. Your position is not very clear. You made such unclear statements before when you talked about the Ganesh drinking milk, which you said it was

- a real occurrence
- scientifically measurable.
- It was not just personal testimony.

But then you proceeded to dismiss it as hocus pocus. Then again you said that it was explained by physics without giving us that explanation. At least if you talk clearly I may be able to understand you, even though I may not agree with what you say.

You wrote:

It does not make sense to say that "X" may possibly exist, when "X" is not a well-defined concept. That's why strictly speaking a rationalist cannot be an agnostic (God MAY possibly exist).

You are confusing rationalism with materialism or positivism. Rationalists are agnostic by nature. The foundation of reason is doubt not conviction.

Atheism asserts that there is no god. Rationalism makes no statement either way regarding the actual existence of god although it rejects any belief based on faith alone. Although there is a strong atheistic influence in modern rationalism, with prominent rational scientists such as Richard Dawkins holding atheistic beliefs, not all rationalists are atheists, and there is a greater compatibility with agnosticism (which asserts that the existence of god is irrelevant or indeterminable) than strong atheism. <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/rationalism%20atheism>.

Reading your articles is always a challenge. One wonders what your position is ultimately. On one hand you say that paranormal cannot possibly exist and a few lines later you surprise your readers with statements such as this:

"Anything is possible that is dictated by the laws of Physics. Laws of Physics is certainly not known fully. So that leaves room for many phenomena to occur without explanation, i.e paranormal phenomena by definition. As I indicated dark matter is one example. Paranormal occurrences are possible IN PRINCIPLE. But anecdotes (individual or collective) are not considered the evidence for paranormal occurrence."

So, finally what are you saying? The above looks like as if taken from my articles. But you and I are not in agreement on this subject. You in fact started attacking my views vehemently supposedly because you do not agree with me. And now you are echoing me? I don't get it! You seem to be shifting position in each paragraph. Are you working on John Kerry's campaign by any chance?

No one is asking you to believe in anecdotes. That is not a logical thing to do. If you believe in what you said in the above quote then you and I agree completely. But that is not what you said all along. You kept saying it is not observable and hence it is impossible. These are two different things.

If it is not observable, it means it can't enter into the parameters of science and hence should not be believed as true. But it does not mean that it is false either. It is simply a theory, which is possible and sometimes probable but one should neither believe in it credulously nor reject it dogmatically.

This is logic. Anything else is either credulity or dogmatism. Really the difference between these two is in the semantics and in the eyes of the beholder. In essence, credulity and dogmatism are one and the same thing.

By rejecting religious credulity you might have saved yourself from the frying pan but by embracing the material dogmatism you have jumped into the fire.